

By: DAVID LEVINSKY

Burlington County Times, April 10, 2009

MOUNT HOLLY - Freshman Congressman John Adler said Thursday that he would seek \$2 million in federal funding to open one of the nation's first health resource centers specializing in the care of women veterans at Virtua Memorial Hospital Burlington County.

Adler, D-6th of Cherry Hill, announced his intentions during a speech to about 100 hospital staffers, saying the proposed resource center at Virtua could serve a growing population of women veterans.

"Virtua, which already does so much related to women's health, can hopefully expand its portfolio of skills to meet the needs of this population," Adler said. "I'm working to appropriate \$2 million in funding so that we can target this population and meet its needs."

Fred Hipp Jr., vice president of government relations for Virtua Health, said the Veterans Administration long has acknowledged that women veterans face gender-specific health-care needs and risk factors for physical ailments such as cancer and bone diseases and mental ones such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

Hipp said the proposed resource center would delve into a more detailed study of those issues and how they affect veterans. He said the center also would work with the VA to create a network of health-care providers for women veterans, and it would act as a one-stop location for information and referrals.

"We want to help women veterans navigate to the resources they need," Hipp said. "Some will be in the VA system; some might be within the community. Basically, we're trying to help augment the VA's established mission."

He said the \$2 million funding would pay for staff, research and outreach materials.

Hipp and Adler said Virtua Memorial offers an ideal location for the proposed center because of

its proximity to the merging military installations of Fort Dix, McGuire Air Force Base and Lakehurst Naval Air Station.

Burlington County already is home to an estimated 6,000 women veterans, and Virtua officials said the military projects that population will double as more servicewomen return home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Adler, who is a member of the House Veterans Services Committee, said he hoped the proposed center would provide a model for the country.

"You can show people in Texas and California how to do this so we treat our women heroes the way they deserve," he said.

Besides seeking funds for the resource center, Adler told the audience of doctors, nurses and staff members that he was optimistic Congress would pass a substantial health-care reform package this year.

"Never before have we seen a consensus about the need for health-care reform, and we have providers and customers all talking together," he said.

"We're looking at some serious and substantial change, and I'm extraordinarily optimistic that we'll get it done this year."

Adler, who was a sponsor of New Jersey's indoor smoking ban law, said he also hoped Congress soon might consider federal legislation to create a nationwide indoor smoking ban.

"We know that secondhand smoke kills in lots of heinous ways," he said.